

## Critical Practice and Literary Theory

### An Interview with Geoffrey Hartman

*Mishra: Professor Hartman, let me start off not with the titles of your books, but with dedications. Wordsworth's Poetry, Auerbach; Beyond Formalism, Harold Bloom; Criticism in the Wilderness, for my students; Saving the Text, The Subject.*<sup>1</sup>

Hartman: Becoming increasingly more abstract, you know.

*Yes: but these dedications I don't think are just normal thank-you's.*

You have left out one, *The Fate of Reading*. That's for Wellek and Wimsatt. As for *Wordsworth's Poetry*, I felt very strongly about Auerbach, although the subject of the book in one sense had nothing to do with him. But in the preface to *The Unmediated Vision* (which I dedicated to my mother) I didn't even mention Auerbach because I mentioned only those who had guided my research, and Auerbach was not one of them, and I felt that to put Auerbach's name there would be to gild the lily.<sup>2</sup> It was a reticence on my part, but Auerbach was not pleased. Not out of feelings of vanity, but because he thought that my scruple was too high. Yet the real reason why I dedicated *Wordsworth's Poetry* to him was because I felt so strongly about him as a scholar and sensitive reader of literature.

*And the next one's Harold Bloom.*

Even though I was away from Yale for five years in the sixties, Harold and I were appointed in the same year as teachers at Yale (1955). We had a real collaboration from about '55 to '61, when I left, and we took up again in '67; and so it reflects that particular period of intellectual ferment. The dedication to *The Fate of Reading* was to teachers with whom I felt an affinity. Though Wimsatt had never been my teacher directly in graduate school, he was the most conversational, the most willing to engage with younger faculty in the sixties. I remember that. There is also another book you have forgotten, the *André Malraux* dedicated to Henri Peyre; so you see I cover everybody.<sup>3</sup> In graduate school the main people from whom I took courses were Henri Peyre, Wellek and Auerbach. It is hard to estimate what one's direct debts are, but I had a sense that that is where I had been, and therefore whether I knew it or not, or acknowledged it or not, it was a debt. But I don't know how pleased the two people were to whom *The Fate of Reading* is dedicated, because it contains the most complex of my essays. And *Criticism in the Wilderness* arose out of my classes at Yale when I became aware — as I had not been before — of the resistance to as well as engagement with what is now called theory, and I began quite involuntarily to expand my notion of close reading into a theory of practice; that is, I had always wanted to plough back theory into practice. I saw that the practice was being misunderstood because there wasn't an explanatory theory. And so as I went around the country I began

to be sensitive to that fact, and I tried to answer questions in a direct way: I thought the best way to answer those questions was not polemically (which I am not particularly good at, nor enjoy) but historically, which may be a form of polemics. I like to do polemics by trying to reconstitute the scholarship, to integrate the history of scholarship with criticism, and thus show that what was happening at that particular time during the sixties and seventies had a real relation to institutional factors, which one supposes are also social factors in the large sense, that is, mediated by social concerns. "To My Students" reflects that. "For the Subject," my dedication to *Saving the Text*, is of course punningly intended, since the subject is not only Derrida or the relation between literature and philosophy, but the questioning of the subject which is the focus of French explorations.

*You started off by speaking about teachers to whom you dedicated many of your works. Do you see yourself as a teacher — a latter day guru, a kind of publicist, almost a prophet, a polemicist (though you dislike the word) — who wishes to reconcile theory with practice? In your performances, too, I notice that you relish the "joy" of teaching.*

I take the flattery; but truly, from the very beginning, I have enjoyed teaching. Nevertheless, I shied away from representing a particular school or set of ideas. I like to enact the process of interpretation, and when I do this, I don't think there is a particular dogma in me, although there may be a certain fervour; and so, unconsciously, something may be working in me. But it's not in any way deliberate. In fact, I could be accused of undermining myself by an almost "dispersive" writing. I am aware that I sometimes become intense and fervent, but that's because I am involved with the subject. On the other hand, I think my tendency is even to understate or undermine the prophetic or guru intention. I wouldn't know what it would mean in literature, really. It only leads, I think, to a lot of polemical vertigo, and sometimes can end in sterile and fruitless discussion.

*So, sitting at the feet of Hartman isn't an exercise that you particularly . . .*

No. In fact (although this is happening less to me now) in the early years of my teaching, and until quite recently, students were both intrigued and perplexed in the sense that they wanted to take this Proteus and bind him, and were unable to do so. Which means that they didn't know enough about my general attitudes to project an image on me, and so they had to rely on my lectures, which disoriented them; and in consequence, I don't seem to be a single person. Relatively very few students did their theses with me, although I helped many. I think this is a reflection of the fact I tend to present things very complexly. I find students — occasionally rather adventurous students — coming to me to be their thesis guide. I find many more who simply talk to me about the formulation of their theses, do them with someone else, and then come back to me to discuss various aspects of them. So I think that indicates that I have no feet to sit at, or there is not going to be a "school," as there might well be for my colleague Harold Bloom, whose ideas and vocabulary are so strong, and who is also

a very passionate and effective teacher. The two sides come together more solidly in him than they do in me. I mean, you can pass through my classes and I suppose go away with something tangible; but I don't know that it bears the stamp of any one school, or can be converted into one.

*Can Hartman be re-written by someone else, in the way in which perhaps even Northrop Frye can be re-written?*

It hasn't been. I don't know whether it can or cannot. It's not a question that bothers me, but it's a question that I am aware of, and therefore you are right in posing it. There's a recent book called *The Yale Critics* which is very perplexed about everybody at Yale, but especially about me, because they find it hard to do what you have just raised — reduction, limitation, and so on.<sup>4</sup> The complaint basically is that in the sixties Paul de Man and I — before the question of Deconstruction came up: as I always say, there was life before Derrida — began to sketch out a different way of looking at the literary spectrum. Both of us were involved in that task. De Man says specifically in the preface to *Allegories of Reading* that he started with the aim of writing literary history and found himself forced back into "close" reading.<sup>5</sup> In my case, it's different. I've always wanted to write a paradigmatic, selective literary history from the Renaissance to the present; and it's not that I haven't been able to conceptualise it, it's that I haven't had the time. The time I could give to it was cut across by many things. In the modern academy there are administrative duties, and there is a lot of teaching to be done. There is very little protection for the intellect to exercise itself truly for two or three years, and so I just haven't been able to write the kind of book that *Wordsworth's Poetry* represents, which I should have written. The form in which I might best communicate what I have to communicate — and therefore achieve a degree of imitability — is literary history.

*Does imitability also mean "critical creativity"? I refer in particular to Saving the Text, where you position yourself as the scriptible writer, endlessly rewriting Derrida.*

I am not sure about that. Yes, imitability was involved, but within a certain frame of elaboration which was really very broad: one can never tell whether the concept of imitation was not used as a shield, when imitation was the cover, for original genius to use that other term. At present, when imitation as such might be in again, the word seems out as a term, having too many relations to copy-theory. We are still concerned with routinisation or over-domestication, and then suddenly Derrida comes along. For a number of years he was contested, and there were all kinds of perplexity. Now that he is being understood and used and sometimes over-used, suddenly there is a complaint about the domestication of Derrida, and so it is clear that you can't win either way. The show of concern is legitimate enough. We can't be so far out that nobody understands us, and become sheer eccentrics. You can't be so far out that the distinguishing features of what you are trying to say, the cutting edge, is blunted. But there are many students and teachers now who may be in bad faith on this matter, and either charge is a way of avoiding the pressure of an original

mind. It may have always been so. But since we have gone into an era of university culture, one is very much aware of a segment within the university that wants to restrict its activity to fairly simple, important, human tasks, such as giving the students a basic literacy and making them think about essential human matters. And of course this group feels that anything which detracts from that end is anti-humanistic or meretricious or ingenuous. A kind of pedagogical faith has arisen, and the tension between that faith and curious knowledge is used as a manoeuvre to disqualify original thinking in the area.

*Saving the Text itself seems to be about listening, re-writing, reappropriating, reorganising semantic fields; wounding and healing and so forth. When I read the text, I seem to hear "Nutting" in the background. In your book on Wordsworth, you wrote two or three pages on this highly unusual poem. An initial restraint, followed by intense phallic wounding?*

Sounds intriguing. I don't think "Nutting" was in the background, but I can see why you pick up those pages which I put as a "machine" (as I call it) prefacing the final section of the Wordsworth book. What you raise in my mind is a larger question, which I really haven't thought about: the relation of *Saving the Text* — written in the last few years of the seventies — to my work on Wordsworth in the fifties, and culminating in the book. It is perfectly true that the theme of wounding (let's forget about the restraint) and the question of the relation of consciousness (or over-consciousness, self-consciousness) as a wounding of nature has been thematically very important, and continues in the article called "Touching Compulsion" in the *Georgia Review*.<sup>6</sup> I introduced some Wordsworth texts into the last part of "Words and Wounds" (in *Saving the Text*), and decided to use them to explore "problematic irony," because irony at first glance is so difficult a feature to specify. You know it's there, but where? Almost anything can be made ironical, and I was intrigued with the question of whether irony could be reinserted into this larger context of wounds and words; but I did not use some other strong Wordsworthian texts. I might come back to "Nutting," but also to texts from *The Prelude*. So I think your perception is right; you indicate a continuity in my own thinking.

*Clearly Wordsworth looms large — and forebodingly — in your consciousness. I believe it was Northrop Frye who wrote about the importance of a major author (suitably mastered and digested) for a critic. How important has the mastery of an author been for you?*

It must have been quite important, although I didn't start with Wordsworth. I started with *The Unmediated Vision*, which put Wordsworth in the company of some later leading poets like Hopkins, Rilke and Valéry. For some reason I took to Wordsworth very early on, even in high school. And there must have been an autobiographical factor. Wordsworth's balance between his relation to social matters (people) and to something called Nature (in which people are, but which isn't people) has always intrigued me. Also, later on, I noticed statements — although not often at the surface level — in which he raises the question of tutorship:

that is, what really teaches a person, what are the formative influences? His concept of Nature's preceptorial role is a myth, and yet it seems to me to contain a great deal of sense. And the fifth book of *The Prelude* (the book on books) comes out very explicitly on how there has to be a countervailing factor: that a poet is not taught by teachers or other people, but that there is some other, "natural" agency. Wordsworth sometimes takes on a mystical tone when he talks about the other agency. He always says it's "nature," and therefore avoids mysticism, except in a very general sense in which we talk about "nature mysticism." It is usually nature as an agency that is both direct and negative, and so at some point things begin to be complex when one thinks about what has really formed the mind of a poet. That intrigued me. It still intrigues me — not from the point of view of the poet, but from the point of view of any deep-thinking, deep-feeling person.

*Is it possible to see Hartman coalescing with Wordsworth? Do you speak in voices, disembodied voices which belong elsewhere?*

No. And when I bring out the theme of voices in Wordsworth, it is really to indicate the way Wordsworth managed internal division, or an aspect Shelley and others have noted: that Wordsworth has to be a monologist. The Romantics were not dramatists — did not transform voices into characters — and even Shelley (who did more drama) and Byron are not exemplary dramatists. But Wordsworth in particular diverts or contains voices within the theme of unity, and that of course is extremely important, because it's part of his "sanity." It's part of a sanity that surprises readers, and I don't think his is an act of voice-repression. It is an act of containment which allows what is contained a certain existence, a certain erroneous existence, and in that sense there is a certain coalescence.

*In The Unmediated Vision your Wordsworth is decidedly more European . . .*

Well certainly I studied Wordsworth in the context of European Romanticism. This was rather unnatural in the era in which I found myself in the 1950s, but perhaps an inevitable turn, given the fact that it was Wordsworth. Byron was always put in a demotic sort of European context, and Blake was being taken up on the continent to some extent. Wordsworth never seemed exportable, and within English studies he had been appropriated in a very narrow way. On the one hand you have the Englishness of Wordsworth to contend with, and on the other hand you have no counterbalance because Europeans did not even attempt to come to terms with Wordsworth. There was a prose translation (I think by Legouis) of *The Prelude*, but no real attempt to translate Wordsworth into German was made until the 1970s. So really there was no significant European scholarship nor understanding of Wordsworth. At the same time, he remained a kind of captive of Englishness, and so I tried to spring him out of the Englishness; but I had to find — to make — my own European connections.

*Here are the beginnings of your interest in Hegel and in Schleiermacher?*

Well, you detect Schleiermacher now. I think in the early stages it was more Hegel, and my fascination with both Hegel's *Aesthetics* and the *Phenomenology*. These two works have meant most to me not because the others are less important — such as *The Philosophy of History* — but because I could respond as a literary person to them. The *Logic* was difficult for me; and obviously I was also intrigued by the early theological writings, and began to see something that seems to fascinate you: the way that theology never quite goes away. I mean how formal thinking about religious matters stimulates people and absorbs them — that became very clear to me.

*And your most recent interest in Nietzsche?*

I had read Nietzsche very early on, although I don't think I understood him, but I liked the spirit. I like someone breaking out of the philological and philosophical strait-jacket. It was mainly, I think, the spirit of Nietzsche and the vibes. I really don't believe I knew what was going on. I know a little better now. I can frame Nietzsche better. I certainly wasn't aware of what has come to be known as Deconstruction, but what I insist on is that the kind of new New Criticism (closer than close reading) which gradually evolved had effectively the result of what is now called Deconstruction. This was done through a technique, but not a cold technique, because my concern was always to get beyond Formalism while realising that you had to go through it. And my avoidance of explicit ideological underpinning is part of the non-imitability or (if you want to put it in a less favourable way) what makes some of my essays harder to catch. One critic complained that I did not stand still long enough on the page for him to catch my meaning. But that is not just impressionistic, it has always been more deliberate. My use of inner quotation, of citing without being explicit — or sometimes a contrary move and sometimes a recursive move (coming back and starting a new interpretation which goes beyond or within or away from the old interpretation) — has been quite deliberate and perhaps most methodical in my second essay on Milton, which was written contrapuntally as it were with the earlier Milton essay in *Beyond Formalism*.<sup>7</sup>

*In Criticism in the Wilderness you propose to "reappropriate" Kenneth Burke, and indeed vigorously suggest the originality of native American Criticism generally.*

Well, you know my feelings: I am as much a historian — even if an engaged historian of criticism as such — as anything else. Even though I don't consider myself a historian with a huge synoptic perspective, I feel very strongly about the convergence of doing criticism and knowing about the history of criticism. While by preference I do the work of interpretation and evaluation, I always think about literary history and the history of criticism, and try to keep all these concerns (some are complex interactions) in mind. I am not sure they are all that complex, but they seem to be so, because one doesn't really know the direct lines of influence. At a pretty early stage (I think around 1960) I became aware of Kenneth Burke and was intrigued with him as a writer, although at that time I felt he

was throwing everything into his prose and was too "impure" to be effective. I don't feel that any more, partly because my idea of purity and impurity in the medium of criticism has changed, and partly because I know more. Continental developments have pointed us back into our tradition — to people like Burke and their historical position — and to recover a way of doing things from within the American side: not for any nationalistic purpose, but just because going outside of the tradition makes you aware of what is within it. So Burke has become important for me. I would not call him a deconstructive critic, but he happens to share with me — I happen to share with him — many themes which he is equally radical about, but perhaps doesn't insist on. (I mean they persist in him, but he doesn't insist on them.) Themes such as the importance of names, or the interaction of anthropology and literary concerns. He has, you know, crazy, marvellous remarks on sound and sound-shapes, and this, I think, is very important. It is a difficult area to deal with, especially since you have to avoid the construction of eccentric theories, just in order to be able to hold on to the subject — it's like holding on to water.

*Like Burke, do you also avoid excessive schematisation?*

Even though formalistic schemes are intended to simplify (perhaps one should say to clarify) I feel they end up schematising and being an interposition. While the act of conceptualisation can be very inventive and is certainly necessary — it should always be inventive — one has to find a way of undoing or allowing those conceptual schemes to undo themselves, and not simply to be endlessly applied. Schematic criticism — and it was often hung up on the scientific model of the paradigm — is certainly not ideal, but then the model of the paradigm itself needs to be refined. I think there is a lot of evidence to show that while this is an interesting way of proceeding intellectually, there is also some illusion in it, in so far as refinement is thought just to go on and on, and you pretend that the paradigm is left unchanged in its original form. But in fact what you have left is really a kind of writing. There are so many layers of superposition and refinement that the old scheme is no longer there, and you have blocked the possibility of something else.

*Do you have a particular theoretical development in mind?*

I really wasn't thinking of any particular development, but was meditating on the contrast points between Brooks and Frye. There is a commonsensical, tactful or tactical approach favoured by someone like Cleanth Brooks which is pedagogically important, but it has to be backed up by some very highly schematic notions, as few as possible, such as paradox. On the other hand there is Frye, who perhaps has too many categories, which results in a new kind of schematisation based on a multiplicity which helps to alleviate the feeling of the schematic. So as I once said, there is a carnivalesque aspect to the Frye system: it's a riot of categories and it alleviates itself, although I am not sure Frye would like to think in these terms. Certainly Brooks doesn't. He is too chaste, and therefore while he starts simply, he is perhaps more heavy and imposing, and I was really referring to that contrast. For me, theory is the realm

where those questions are pondered, and not only pondered but resolved in the act of writing actively about texts. Whether those texts are fictional or non-fictional, you work at those questions. But (this may be a limit in me) I really do not have a doctrine about whether one should have few terms or many, one schematism or a kind of elaborate but self-undoing (self-consuming, if you wish) schematism. All I know is that I oppose doctrines which say criticism should never use technical terms, or as few as possible. I myself think that the way to put it is that criticism should be inventive. If it needs technical terms they should be imaginative, and they should not substitute for anything. Once they begin to stand in the way, you should dissolve them back into the prose, or should find some way of using them and then not using them any more. And I can see an exercise, or a style, which is created deliberately by not using, or by trying not to use, technical terms. But I don't see how this can be exclusive or imperative when it comes to critical exchange.

*I notice that criticism rather than theory figures prominently in your discourse. In current literary discourse, it is theory which tends to emerge much more consistently. Your reticence on the subject may indicate either an aversion to theory or, conversely, a take-it-for-granted view of it.*

First of all, it's because I don't have a theory. Secondly, I don't have a theory because theory is an activity which has theorems in it: I see it as an activity which is also a matter of style. Thirdly (and this is really not third, but "correlatively"), because from the beginning it was unclear to me whether it could be a theory of praxis. And lastly, because the only theorem about theory which I have (and this had become relatively stable and more close to a dogma which I try to base on historical evidence) is that theory is not only an activity, but a special kind of activity, a project. And that project is to fashion some *non-ideological* "project," because it is questionable whether you can have a position in literary studies without being ideologically committed.

*This explains the dedications to Auerbach, Bloom, Brooks?*

I am not sure it would explain Bloom. You see I am caught because when you consider theories as anti-ideological projects, you're back, at least in appearance, to Formalism. And while Auerbach isn't formalistic, you could say that René Wellek was a kind of post-formalist, or neo-formalist thinker. I see Formalism, including pedagogical Formalism, as participating in the attempt to be at least firm about limiting ideology ("propaganda"). So some of the dedications may be related to that. But really we mustn't read too much into these dedications. I should like to repeat that the person whose literary practice I most esteem is Auerbach. But I have a sense of the drama of teaching literature, and of the characters in the drama of what would seem to be the immediate, i.e. personality. But they are really acting out a process which I would call impersonal. Even supra-personal: it has a larger aspect as you stand back and look at the history I am posing. Some of them are strong teachers, or are positioned in universities where they are teaching potentially significant students who will form a tradition.



*Strong teachers or strong textualists? Do I detect a preference for the latter in you?*

It's not that I think one cannot go into a sort of eclipse. As you pointed out, a critic allies himself with (or finds himself in the company of) one artist, such as Wordsworth or Blake. And by the same process he also finds himself in the company of perhaps not one but a small number of other critics who seem to be relatively compact. Lionel Trilling for a long time seemed to me too evasive and genteel or aspiring to a certain complacency. But lately I've been able, from some distance, to understand the role he played, which means I am more aware of the ideological pressures on him. In the case of Burke the understanding came more quickly. I feel more for Burke, but I wouldn't say necessarily that he's a stronger critic; he just seems to be more resourceful than Trilling. There's no question in my mind of the importance of Burke to American literary scholarship. When I recently read Gundolf again — since I have an interest in Shakespeare — I could see his role, at least within the German scene, and that's important: that's part of the history of scholarship, which does not mean that he has helped me to read Shakespeare. Kenneth Burke touches me at a level where I think that what he has done in scholarship and in criticism is still an active part of what we are discovering. So my relation to him is different from my relation to someone like Gundolf.

*Hartman has written widely — from literary history to psycho-analysis . . .*

You think I'm a poacher?

*The "poaching" nevertheless stops at political issues. Hartman is remarkably silent, except perhaps in the margins of his discourse, on the politics of writing and generally on Marxist criticism. There is also a consistency in your discursive practice . . .*

You have clearly not come to a recent article called "The New Wilderness," which has only just appeared.<sup>8</sup> There I touch the political issue directly. I am also working on a book on critical style, where the political issue comes up in a context that does not displace art. Those who talk about the politics of art have not found a way of talking about it without displacing art or making it an instrument of state, or the class struggle, and so on. If you go back to the last essay in *Beyond Formalism*, called "Towards Literary History," you will see that I am struggling there with that issue, and in discussing a film by Godard I raise what you would call the political issue. It's not that I wish to stay away from it. It's that I have not found a way of dealing with it in such a manner that everything doesn't get shifted away from art, and art dissolves into too large a discourse, which is then called political — the newest move both in Jameson and Eagleton. In Eagleton's recent book on literary theory we are given a political conclusion which shows that literary theory is of very little account except as a thing we must recognise to be ideologically motivated. While I share that consciousness — that very intense consciousness of the ambient, inside or outside, to frame literature or literary studies — I feel a very strong obligation to the field which is really there, and which I don't

want to dissolve into a larger field which you couldn't even teach. Others think there is a field called cultural studies; so I would say, okay, try it. But at the moment, especially in the American university, the situation is such that cultural studies is within English willy-nilly. But English is such an umbrella term that any effort to displace the "stubborn basement" of English studies will dilute the American enterprise in favour of something which is just going to raise a furore and make our position even less tenable. I think there is enough protection for the Marxist critic or the radical social critic within the university, and that further protection doesn't have to be ensured. For me it has become an intellectual matter: what is the best way of doing literary studies? I don't think that Eagleton's way is the best way of doing it, and I have too many problems with the hypothesis of Jameson's *The Political Unconscious*.<sup>9</sup>

*What happens if someone like Eagleton turns around and accuses you of revisionism (in the reactionary sense of the word) in trying to return to Eliot, to recuperate Arnold, to rewrite Leavis?*

I have to admit that since these came before me it is possible that I am still in their orbit. The only way to avoid that is to systematically deny or ignore them, and as a historian of criticism I can't do that. So if, as a historian of criticism, I have to deal with Eliot, I put myself of course in a position of being accused of revisionism. But even Eagleton would have to agree that since Marxism is also a philosophy of history, it acknowledges the reality of history — that Eliot did occur, and that we have to deal with that. You deal with Eliot in one way, Leavis deals with Eliot in his way, and I will deal with Eliot in another way. So you see — you might indeed say — this is not a matter of whether I deal with Eliot in a reactionary or revisionist manner: it is an intellectual matter to be fought over in the longer run. When I did this exercise — partially in *Criticism in the Wilderness* — of thinking about the most influential essay of our time, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," I found myself deconstructing Eliot. I don't see how that could be of use to "revisionists." No, only by a bad faith move on the part of Eagleton or someone like him could the traditional claim of revisionism be made against me. He couldn't say we shouldn't be dealing with Eliot at this time, because he knows that historically that era is not past.

*Your defence may be misconstrued by many traditional literature departments to legitimate their highly "uncritical" teaching. They might well say, "What we are doing is right because Hartman agrees with us."*

You know they are not saying that. Not yet.

*I am simply projecting a possibility.*

Well, you have to decide the nature of literary colloquy: what it is, and whether in fact it should revolutionise itself instead of modifying itself as I am proposing. And whether the period of isolation (which I think went too far) was indeed, was even more, a period of delusion, and a historical error so grave that it has to be denied, undone. What I say instead is that we have to pose the question of what to do about a university culture, and I think

the insulation or separatism of our subject is in part due to its moving so much into the university. I am sorry, but there isn't a countervailing balance. I am sorry that having attracted so many talents into the university we don't have talents outside the university who are not antagonistic to it, or who do not become aggressively journalistic. Journalism is one of the most important developments in the literate sphere. It doesn't have to be aggressively antagonistic to arrest academicism. It may be that things have moved too much into the university, and therefore I would agree: I am part, it seems to me, of that redressment. But I can't think that we should open the walls of the university entirely, or diminish our own field because other fields claim to have a closer relation to social reality. We have a very close relation to social reality, and we do not manifest that by throwing ourselves out, but by making other people aware of how what has happened in literary studies has that connection. We do this by using an interpreter's strength and privilege in showing it, and not by doctrine — that is, not by adopting a doctrine and saying that literature is an illusion, a highly mediated activity, still enmeshed in superstructural forms of thinking. We should not dissolve ourselves into another entity called cultural studies or political studies.

*On the question of doctrine: you would still say that there is room for Marxist criticism in departments of literature?*

Absolutely, yes. And most Marxist critics would call themselves post-Marxists at this point, anyway, so it might even be reactionary to call something Marxist criticism. Marxist criticism is finally beginning — and it intrigues me — to establish itself on university grounds (or on intellectual grounds generally), but perhaps not simply as Marxist criticism, in that it is the problematics of the engagement of literary criticism with Marxism and not Marx himself that is important.

*Turning again to Saving the Text: it seems to me that, for Hartman, Derrida is extremely important because he poses a threat to our habitual responses to literature. The concepts of "deferral" and "supplementarity," for instance, allow us to contest the kind of criticism that mistakenly represents itself as dogma.*

Let me answer that question briefly. Derrida was important for me because he relieved me of the necessity to construct a theory which I had felt I should construct. Derrida shows what a philosopher can do in this area, and he does it in a very functional manner. I was at an impasse (in terms of philosophy) for a theory of practice, and he found a way of doing it. That was functionally important, and he got me out of that impasse: he gave me the courage to continue in that line, but I never changed my criticism because of him. What I became more confident about is that we could have a way of talking about our subject which was more overtly and philosophically conscious than before.

Yale University

Murdoch University

Geoffrey Hartman

Vijay Mishra  
Interviewer

- <sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1964); *Beyond Formalism* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1980); *Criticism in the Wilderness* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1980); *Saving the Text: Literature/Derrida/Philosophy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1981).
- <sup>2</sup> Hartman, *The Fate of Reading* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975); *The Unmediated Vision: An Interpretation of Wordsworth, Hopkins, Rilke and Valéry* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1954).
- <sup>3</sup> Hartman, *André Malraux* (London: Bowes, 1960).
- <sup>4</sup> Jonathan Arac et al., eds., *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America*, Theory and History of Literature, Vol. 6 (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1983).
- <sup>5</sup> Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979).
- <sup>6</sup> Hartman, "Touching Compulsion: Wordsworth and the Problem of Literary Representation," *Georgia Review*, 31 (Spring 1977), 345-61.
- <sup>7</sup> Hartman, "Adam on the Grass with Balsamum," *ELH*, 36 (March 1965), 386-97, and "Milton's Counterplot," *ELH*, 25 (1958), 1-12; both rpt. in *Beyond Formalism*, pp. 124-50 and 113-23.
- <sup>8</sup> Hartman, "The New Wilderness," in Ihab and Sally Hassan, eds., *Innovation/Renovation* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1983).
- <sup>9</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981).

—The Johns Hopkins University Press—



elh

Stephen Orgel, Senior Editor

**ELH**

**English Literary History**  
**March, June, September, and December**

This outstanding scholarly journal publishes critical, interpretive, and documentary contributions to the study of literature. *ELH* has traditionally emphasized historical continuity in the discipline of letters, but its pages are hospitable to and reflect the widest variety of critical perspectives in all areas of English and American literature.

Individuals \$16

Institutions \$37

The Johns Hopkins University Press • Journals Division • Baltimore, Maryland 21218

Prepayment required. Subscriptions are available on a calendar year basis only. Maryland residents please add 5% sales tax. Foreign postage \$3.00.

A5